A

BLOW

AT THE

ROOT

OF ALL

PRIESTLY CLAIMS:

PROVING, FROM SCRIPTURE,

That every Layman has a Right not only to pray and preach in Public, but alſo to adminiſter the Ordinances of Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper; and that thoſe, to whom theſe Offices are now committed, derive all their Authority from the People who chooſe to attend upon them, and not from Ordination, either by a Biſhop or Preſbyters; which latter Notion is ſhewn to be groundleſs and miſchievous.

DEDICATED TO THE

CHRISTIAN LAITY

OF

EVERY PARTY AND DENOMINATION.

WITH

A few REMARKS on the *Eſſays on Public Worſhip, Patriotiſm, and Projects of Reformation.*

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TO THE

CHRISTIAN LAITY

OF

Every PARTY and DENOMINATION.

FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

I DOUBT not but that many of you are convinced that "*The faith once* "*delivered to the ſaints*," the Chriſtian revelation as preached by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, is a moſt ſacred truſt; not committed to the care of this or that ſort of men, but to all Chriſtians alike, as equally intereſted in it, and equally obliged to profeſs and to preſerve it in its purity. The words "*once delivered*," are very emphatical, inſtructing us to look for our faith in the Scriptures alone, and that we muſt learn from them every thing relating to it. That ſome would endeavour to draw off the attention of Chriſtians from this only rule, and, by means of

it, greatly exalt themſelves, is foretold. If we look into eccleſiaſtical hiſtory we ſhall find that corrupt doctrines and practices were gradually introduced, in the ſame proportion as the clergy gained power and authority. The Pope, who has been ſtiled in the latter ages *Our Lord God the Pope*, uſed once to ſtile himſelf, the *Servant of Servants:* and though the clergy now have titles of honour, magnificent houſes, large eſtates appropriated to their maintenance, and the tenths of all the produce of our lands and of our cattle, clear of every expence of cultivation, keeping, &c. and ſome of thoſe, who have been called *moderate churchmen*, have repreſented it as ſacrilege, that a full tenth part of the clear gains of merchandize, huſbandry, manufactures, and of every other lawful occupation is not allowed them: yet, of old, this order of men was entirely ſupported by the *voluntary contributions* of thoſe who attended upon them, and who might withdraw ſuch aſſiſtance when they diſliked

diſliked any thing in the preachers or their doctrine. This was indeed the golden age of Chriſtianity; never did religion, as conſiſting in a ſober, virtuous, and holy life, flouriſh more. A biſhoprick, that is the care of a worſhipping congregation, was looked upon as an office more than a benefice; a charge which laid him, who accepted of it, under an obligation to be diligent and conſtant in preaching, and not, as a privilege, exempting a man from all paſtoral duties. The laity were then conſidered as a holy prieſthood; to them it belonged to adminiſter religious ordinances, or to authorize any whom they thought proper: they were conſidered as the church; and biſhops, and other preachers, *their* miniſters, i. e. ſervants. By degrees, however, the ſervants became the maſters: the laity ſuffered them to be the only diſpenſers of religious ordinances, and to appoint others to the ſame ſervice, from whence aroſe the idea, that there was ſome peculiar ſanctity in the miniſterial

niſterial character. This led them to claim the ſole power in ſpirituals, and to impoſe what articles of faith, and modes of worſhip they pleaſed: This alſo, in a little time enabled them to obtain an independency in temporals: They refuſed to be tried for offences againſt the community by civil judges, and would not ſubmit to the taxes which the legiſlature impoſed; but whilſt they were graſping at all the Eſtates in the kingdom, under a pretence of applying them to pious uſes, only paid ſuch a proportion as they pleaſed towards the public expences. They were greatly humbled at the reformation, and the memories of ſeveral biſhops and clergymen will be had in everlaſting honour, who joined with the laity in treating theſe high claims, as both unſcriptural, and inconſiſtent with the welfare of the community. The opinions, however, which firſt gave riſe to thoſe evils, continue to be held ſacred by numbers, and are oppoſed by few. It is the deſign of the following

ſheets,

ſheets, to ſhew how groundleſs they are. This publication is not levelled at any party in particular, and it is dedicated to you the chriſtian laity in general, as all equally concerned. The yoke of ſpiritual tyranny hath long galled the necks of the diſciples of Jeſus: If the principles I have adopted had been attended to as they ought, it could never have been laid on; and it is a happy circumſtance, that what would have prevented the diſeaſe can even now effect a cure: The ſooner it is applied the better. "The kingdom "of *Prieſtcraft* is now aſſailed from a "variety of quarters, and the ſupport-"ers of it are gnawing their tongues "for pain, though, without repent-"ing of their deeds." This publication is a blow aimed not at any of the outworks, but at the very foundation of their Babel; and if ſeconded by you to whom it is dedicated, it muſt fall to the ground. The principles here defended, are in themſelves very

very important, whatever they may ſuffer through my inability of repreſenting them in their full ſtrength and force. I hope ſome abler pen will do this; and in the mean time that you, to whom the ſubject is intereſting both as men, and as Chriſtians, as friends to the happineſs of the preſent world, and as the heirs of another, will forgive the many defects of the well-meaning

AUTHOR.

A

B L O W

At the ROOT of all

PRIESTLY CLAIMS.

PERSONS of reading and reflection, and more eſpecially the friends of religion, enjoy great and diſtinguiſhed happineſs in this age and country. The means for improving in knowledge are eaſily procured. And it is noble encouragement to the ſincere inquirers after truth, that they are not tempted through the terror of penal laws, (which for the preſent at leaſt ſeem to lie dormant) or the fear of being repreſented as the objects of deteſtation and abhorrence, to withhold any opinions from the public, which appear to them to be of importance, or to conceal their diſlike of any remainders of ſuperſtition, to which long cuſtom and great names have given a ſanction. Not

many years ſince, he who declared any ſentiment, or made any propoſal contrary to the generally received notions, was either accounted a knave, a turbulent perſon, or a madman. If he eſcaped a ſevere proſecution in the courts of juſtice, which was ſometimes the conſequence of a free and undiſguiſed declaration of opinion; yet he was ſure to draw upon himſelf, the bitter cenſures of the prieſthood of every denomination. The people joined in the clamour, and men of *prudence*, whatever they might think of the matter, were obliged to be very circumſpect. When the ſubject came at any time upon the carpet, it was happy for them if they were allowed to keep ſilence, and it was neceſſary to ſhew outwardly a ſtrong diſlike, or at leaſt a great coldneſs to the man, whoſe deſire of communicating knowledge, cauſed him to be leſs wary than theſe cunning gentlemen.

For there are many, who had rather let truth lie at the bottom of the well, than uſe any endeavours to draw it up, at the hazard of their characters, their popularity, and their pockets. But thanks to the boldneſs of ſome free ſpirits, who by degrees introduced a habit of thinking on all ſubjects with candour and impartiality, any man may now publiſh what he pleaſes. None are found hardy enough to expoſe themſelves to the ſcorn and deteſtation of the age, by preferring a bill of indictment againſt a heretic, and the virulent abuſe of two or three

univerſity orators, or methodiſtical ranters, affects a man's reputation but little. He who appears to be really ſincere and upright, is publickly countenanced and favoured, even by thoſe who, though oppoſite in ſentiment, juſtly think every honeſt, impartial inquirer to be worthy of honour. But few comparatively of ſuch as think at all, are ſhy of the acquaintance of Heretics, or Hereſiarchs.

That very bold writer, the author of the Eſſays on Public Worſhip, Patriotiſm, and Projects of Reformation, with the Appendix to it, would not have drawn upon himſelf the reſentment of the warmeſt friends of Chriſtianity, by his arguments only. They would not have diſturbed him *in his haunts amongſt the mountains*, nor been angry *at his climbing rocks, and tempting dangers*, had he not larded his performance with the moſt illiberal abuſe, and, notwithſtanding his high profeſſions of honour, been guilty of ſhameful miſrepreſentations. His propoſal to ſuch Deiſts, as are really friends to natural religion, and ſincere lovers of virtue, to join in public acts of praiſe and thankſgiving to the great Being of beings, would have met with the warm approbation of thoſe, who beſt underſtood and moſt ardently loved the religion of Jeſus. They would indeed have obſerved to him, that an attempt to bring unbelievers in revelation to join in public forms of worſhip, would be attended with great difficulty, however laudable. They have no fixed

rules by which to form their devotions, and they are not agreed in thoſe opinions, on a firm and ſettled belief of which all religion muſt be grounded. It is well known that many who have made no ſmall figure among the Deiſts, and are their admired writers, have denied thoſe leading principles, which are the only motives that can induce men, to cultivate pious and benevolent diſpoſitions.

'God's moral government and particular 'providence; his worſhip, eſpecially as it in-'cludes prayer and praiſe; man's free agency, 'the Immortality of the Soul, and a future 'ſtate of retribution, have made no part of 'their creed. Some have been far from plead-'ing for that ſtrictneſs of virtue, which others 'ſay natural religion obliges men to; and in-'ſtead of urging the neceſſity of repentance, 'have, after Spinoza, repreſented it as a mean, 'an unreaſonable and wretched thing*, and 'the rewards and puniſhments of a future 'ſtate have been exploded under the notion of 'bribes and terrors, a regard to which argueth 'a ſordid and mercenary temper of ſoul, in-'conſiſtent with a true and generous virtue‡.' Suppoſing Deiſts could agree upon ſome form of worſhip, including all thoſe principles which are commonly diſtinguiſhed by the name of na-

* Pœnitentia virtus non eſt, ſive ex ratione non oritur: quem facti pœnitet bis miſer ſeu impotens eſt Spin. Eth. Pt. 4. prop. 54.

‡ Leland's View of the Deiſtical Writers. V. I. p. 8.

tural

tural religion, yet they muſt form diſtinct ſocieties. Chriſtians may heartily approve of their thus complying with the dictates of conſcience, but for them to join in it would be an affront to their great maſter, and acting expreſly contrary to the commands of that book, which is the rule of their Faith and Practice. Are we worthy of a revelation unleſs we publickly expreſs our regards to it? The Divine Being has provided a Mediator through whom we may have acceſs unto him; and ſhall we dare to offer up our prayers without declaring ourſelves his diſciples, and thus acknowledging him before men? Muſt we act in direct contradiction to the precept of the inſpired apoſtle? *Whatſoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jeſus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* Coloſſians iii. 17*.

It is very raſh and haſty in the author of the Eſſays, to charge thoſe Chriſtians with *malignity*, who would object againſt following his plan, ſince their being chriſtians obliges them to make mention of their Saviour in every act of prayer and praiſe. But this unjuſtifiable

* Many profeſſing Chriſtians ſeem very forgetful of this precept, when they aſk for a bleſſing on their food, or return thanks for the refreſhment received. Two or three words haſtily and irreverently repeated, which to a Turk or an Indian, would appear more like a charm than a prayer, without any mention of Chriſt through whom alone we have reaſon to hope for acceptance, compoſe that form which is commonly called ſaying Grace. Surely the man who is no friend to long graces, ought not to think it too much to repeat a few words with gravity and ſerioufneſs in the name of the Redeemer.

expreſſion, would have been imputed rather to inattention and careleſſneſs than to any bad deſign, did not he appear through the whole of his pamphlet, to write like a man, ſwelled with conceit, full of ſpite and rancour, and that *ſaintiſh* ſpirit (as he would term it) which under the appearance of a regard to ſomething truly valuable, takes occaſion to injure the characters of the worthy, and meanly endeavours to prejudice men againſt important ſentiments, by repreſenting the friends of them in falſe and diſagreeable colours. Thoſe who read his pamphlet with attention, and are acquainted with the character of thoſe diſſenting miniſters, againſt whom his ſtrokes of ſatire ſeem principally levelled, will not think what is here ſaid too ſevere. It is a year and a half ſince I read his eſſays, and therefore do not write under the influence of that warmth which we at firſt feel, when the principles to which we are attached, and thoſe whom we regard as ornaments to ſuch principles are abuſed and vilified. What is here ſaid is grounded on what he has laid before the public, for as an individual he never hated me, our connections do not in the leaſt interfere, and our places of abode are very remote from each other.

Every lover of truth muſt however wiſh, that thoſe who read his writings, would take notice of the ſpirit which evidently appears to have dictated them, and it would be an effectual antidote againſt any miſchief they might otherwiſe

wiſe do, to the young and inconſiderate, whoſe virtue is in danger from being undermined, as well as openly attacked. The Gentlemen of the eſtabliſhment alſo who are unacquainted with diſſenting miniſters, ſhould be adviſed, not to imagine that their general language is mere cant, or their conduct as a body tyrannical and arbitrary, which the author of the eſſays more than inſinuates.

I think I have not gone much out of my way, in taking notice of this writer, who is an inſtance of what very free things a man may write, even with the approbation of thoſe who greatly differ from him. His propoſal was thought by great numbers of Chriſtians to be a very good one in itſelf, and ſo far as it concerned the Deiſts they wiſhed him ſucceſs. The latter however did not pay much attention to his ſcheme, though he ſeemed very confident of it, and affirmed (unleſs my memory fails me) that there were *thouſands* who would gladly cloſe in with it, on principles of the utmoſt reverence to the Deity, and benevolence to mankind. But had he wrote with that ſtrict honour to which he pretends, mere diſappointment, and not the contempt of the wiſe and good, would have been the only conſequence.

At a ſeaſon ſo friendly to free enquiry, when many are ſo buſy in lopping off the ſuperfluous branches which have been grafted upon religion, and too long eſteemed as real parts of

it, the conſiderations offered in the following pages will probably meet with a candid reception. Some imagine that thoſe who are engaged in pulling up the tares, through their too great eagerneſs, ſometimes pull up the wheat alſo with them. And many think that there appears in the generality ſuch a diſinclination to the duties which are properly of a religious nature, that there is no occaſion, as in the laſt age, to caution men againſt ſuperſtition, as conſiſting in an undue regard to externals; but, that the attention of the pious needs to be principally directed, towards quickening men to a more ſerious and ſtrict regard to them. The latter is certainly a very neceſſary work; but what more likely method is there, to engage men to be really hearty in religion, than to tell them plainly what religion is? Whilſt any thing is called by that name which upon a fair examination appears to be no part of it, unleſs it be immediately rejected ſome will imagine that there is much of what is ſpurious, and their eſteem be perhaps leſſened for that which is genuine, leſt they ſhould be deceived by putting a value on what is counterfeit. Whatever has no foundation in reaſon or ſcripture is not religion, and can be of no uſe, however venerable cuſtom and antiquity may have rendered it. The ſooner therefore it is exploded the better.

What noiſe and contention have ariſen from the cuſtom of ordaining perſons to the work of the

the miniſtry? What terrible conſequences would follow from ſome of the opinions advanced on this head, particularly in the laſt age?

It was a doctrine univerſally received, till our brethren the Quakers declared againſt it, "that for any man to take upon him the paſtoral care of any congregation of Chriſtians, "unleſs conſecrated or ordained by prayer and "impoſition of hands, was not only irregular, "but a ſacrilegious intruſion into a holy office. "The Baptiſm adminiſtered by ſuch a one "would have been accounted invalid, and the "bread and wine received from his hands, to "be accompanied with no bleſſing from God. "In this perſuaſion men of every party ſeemed "to be thoroughly agreed, but where to place "this power of conferring orders was moſt "warmly debated."

The epiſcopal party, from the time of Archbiſhop Laud, ſtrenuouſly maintained, that it was abſolutely neceſſary that every miniſter ſhould be ordained by a dioceſan Biſhop, and that ſuch as were not ſo ordained were mere laymen and their miniſtrations invalid. They pretended that there was an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of Biſhops from the time of the Apoſtles, who conveyed to each other the power of giving the Holy Ghoſt to all whom they ſhould ordain by the impoſition of their hands. Having once got this ſenſeleſs notion into their heads, which flattered their ſpiritual pride,

pride, and led many of the ſuperſtitious laity to think that reverence due to them, which would have made each a Pope in his own dioceſe, they defended it through thick and thin. On this doctrine of an uninterrupted ſucceſſion, not having one text in the Bible to ground it on, and expreſly contrary to the information we receive from eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, they made the very being of a chriſtian church to depend*.

The Popes, from whom all the Biſhops in the Weſtern parts of Europe derived their powers, were many (it may be ſaid moſt) of them, fornicators, adulterers, ſorcerers, robbers, murderers, ſodomites, atheiſts. The decrees of one were often ſet aſide by his ſucceſſor, and frequently there were two at one

* Biſhop Beveridge affirmed: "That without this uninterrupted ſucceſſion there can be no miniſters of Chriſt; that the people's acceptance with God depends upon it, and that if the power was once loſt, none could renew it or begin a new ſucceſſion, till Chriſt was pleaſed to ſend new Apoſtles; and could it once be made clear that this ſucceſſion hath been interrupted, it would alſo prove further, that Chriſt hath neglected to provide for his church in a caſe ſo eſſential to the very Being of it, notwithſtanding his having expreſly promiſed to be ever with it to the end of the world: that if the ſucceſſion be once broken, and the power of ordination once loſt, not all the men on earth, not all the angels in heaven, without an immediate commiſſion from Chriſt can reſtore it." Theſe rare doctrines have been republiſhed in a pamphlet, printed at New-York in 1767. A pamphlet wrote at the *appointment*, and according to the *direction* of a *Convention* of Miſſionaries to promote the deſign of ſending Biſhops to America. See Furneaux's Letters to Blackſtone. Lett. 6.

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time, each pretending himſelf to be the proper ſucceſſor of St. Peter, and each in conſequence of it appointing Biſhops; whilſt it is moſt certain, according to the high church doctrine, that one or the other of them, as there cannot be two Biſhops in one See, muſt have been a Schiſmatic, and incapable of conveying true orders.

The learned Doctor Hurd, in his celebrated Lectures on Prophecy, informs his readers, that it was a leading principle of our firſt reformers, "that the Pope was antichriſt. "This is affirmed with regard to popery at "large, in very ſtrong terms, in one of the "homilies, to which every clergyman ſub-"ſcribes as containing a good and wholeſome "doctrine. In one of them it is ſaid, that "the church of Rome is idolatrous and an-"tichriſtian, not only a harlot as the ſcripture "calleth her, but alſo a foul, filthy, withered "old harlot, the fouleſt and filthieſt that ever "was ſeen, and that it at preſent is (i. e. "when the homilies were drawn up, more than "two hundred years ago, and popery is ſtill "the ſame maſs of corruption) and hath been "for nine hundred years far from the nature "of a true church. Yet thoſe who had ſub-"ſcribed to this, boldly affirmed that the "church which they had ſo ſolemnly declared "to be no true church, could convey genu-"ine apoſtolical orders; and that though it was "a foul filthy harlot, from no power beſides

"could

" could they derive their commiſſion as mi-
" niſters of the pure goſpel of Chriſt. They
" acknowledged the ignorant, idolatrous, per-
" ſecuting Biſhops and Clergy, of Spain, Italy,
" &c. to be true paſtors and teachers, whilſt
" the moſt learned and pious of the Proteſtant
" Divines, out of their own communion, were
" regarded as mere intruders into the ſacred
" office." Such arguing in civil affairs would have been univerſally laughed at, but nonſenſe itſelf muſt be thought ſacred, when adopted by the defenders of the eccleſiaſtical faith. To infuſe this ridiculous notion the more eaſily into the people, Laud expunged ſome paſſages from the Book of Common Prayer, which were in the ſtyle of the homily juſt quoted, and the following inſtance will ſhew to what a height it was carried.

The Queen of Bohemia (from whom his preſent Majeſty is deſcended) only ſiſter to Charles I. ſolicited the King her brother, in the moſt preſſing manner to admit of a public collection over England, for her late ſubjects the poor perſecuted miniſters of the Palatinate, who were baniſhed that country for their religion by the Papiſts. A brief was granted in which were theſe words. " Whoſe caſes are the more to be deplored, be-
" cauſe this extremity is fallen upon them, for
" their ſincerity and conſtancy in the true re-
" ligion, which we, together with them pro-
" feſſed; whereas theſe religious perſons might
" have enjoyed their eſtates and fortunes, if

" with

" with other backſliders in the time of trial, " they would have ſubmitted themſelves to the " antichriſtian yoke." Laud, ſo long the idol of the Engliſh clergy, expunged theſe paſſages, denying that they were of the ſame religion with us, becauſe their miniſters had not epiſcopal ordination. And he objected to the calling the religion of the church of Rome an antichriſtian yoke, becauſe it would then follow, that ſhe was in no capacity to convey ſacerdotal powers in ordination, and conſequently the benefit of the prieſthood, and the force of holy miniſtrations would be loſt in the Engliſh church, foraſmuch as ſhe had no orders but what ſhe derived from the church of Rome. He had even the boldneſs and the inhumanity to cauſe the Princeſs and her children to be left out in the collect for the royal family, when a new edition of the Common Prayer Book was printed after the Reſtoration: this was regarded as eſſential in the church of England. One great objection made to conformity by the ejected miniſters, was the neceſſity of being ordained by a dioceſan Biſhop. A compliance with this, they thought, would have been a denial of the validity of their former ordination, and conſequently acknowledging that all their miniſtrations were null and void; and though they had no doubt of the validity of ordination conferred by a dioceſan Biſhop, yet they could not do any thing which would appear like an acknowledgment

that ſuch ordination alone was ſo. The learned Mr. Dodwell at length carried this notion ſo far as to aſſert, " that we are all naturally " mortal, and that immortality was only at " baptiſm conferred upon the ſoul, by the gift " of God, through the hands of one ſet of " regularly-ordained clergy." This doctrine was received with the contempt which it deſerved, by all moderate churchmen; the high party however, ſtrenuouſly maintained that preſbyterians and ſectaries were unbaptized perſons. This notion was inſtilled with great induſtry into the minds of the people in the reign of Queen Anne, for as the far greater part of the clergy were Jacobites and declared enemies to the Hanover family, who were preſbyterians before their elevation to the throne of Great Britain, and had been baptized by ſuch miniſters, it was probably hoped that by means of this artifice they would be eſteemed unfit to govern a chriſtian land, and the popular prejudices be greatly ſtrengthened. Indeed ſo ſtrong were they, that a very large part of many congregations in London would ſit down, when the Princeſs Sophia, mother of George I. and her family were prayed for, and the clergy would endeavour to avoid the charge of offering up prayers contrary to the ſentiments of their minds, by ſaying *pray ye*, inſtead of let us pray, or ſometimes *we are commanded to pray*. The mention of theſe things may perhaps be thought foreign

reign to the matter in hand, but it may ſerve to ſhew, what ſad effects might have proceeded from laying ſuch ſtreſs on epiſcopal ordination, when our civil liberties were endangered by it, and it was a common and popular ſaying, It is better to have a popiſh than a preſbyterian Prince; the former being allowed to be the ſon of a true church, but not the latter. Diſſenters have ſometimes been refuſed chriſtian burial, under pretence of their being unbaptized perſons; and though the clergy are obliged, if it be inſiſted on, to perform this office, yet many do it with reluctance, and there are not wanting inſtances of thoſe, who upon going over to the church, have been again baptized, as though the ordinance had never been adminiſtered to them. It is ſomewhat ſtrange that ſuch a ſtreſs ſhould be laid upon this matter, ſince the *bleſſed martyr* King Charles was baptized by a preſbyterian, nor was the ceremony ever repeated. Midwives were alſo authorized by the church of England to baptize children in danger of death, until the puritans obtained an alteration in this particular.

But notwithſtanding the repetition of baptiſm once adminiſtered, is contrary to the primitive doctrine, to the principles of our firſt reformers, and to the practice of the church of England for many years, yet this abſurd notion has been lately countenanced by one of the brighteſt ornaments (as far as learning and

and abilities are ornamental) of the preſent eſtabliſhment.

The right reverend Father in God, Dr. Thomas Newton, Lord Biſhop of Briſtol, and Dean of St. Paul's, has given his ſanction to this ſuperſtitious and uncharitable notion, by rebaptizing the wife of a clergyman in Dorſetſhire. This lady was of a diſſenting family, and had been baptized by one who was long the worthy paſtor of a reſpectable congregation, but when joined in holy matrimony to a country curate, was no longer deemed a thorough Chriſtian. His lordſhip from whoſe knowledge of the world, as well as from his great acquaintance with the ſubject of religion, better things might have been expected, inſtead of endeavouring to infuſe a more liberal ſpirit into the clergy of his dioceſe, performed this ceremony with his own ſacred hands. Had this lady been a convert from popery, his lordſhip would doubtleſs have thought this trouble unneceſſary, for it is ſomewhat remarkable, that though a worthy divine ſet apart to the work of the miniſtry, by pious and religious preſbyters in Scotland, or Holland, or England, muſt be re-ordained before he can officiate as a miniſter in the eſtabliſhed church, yet of a popiſh prieſt this is not required. It is a point which the friends of the uninterrupted ſucceſſor muſt not give up, that a popiſh Biſhop though he hath never received the ſcriptures, as it is well known many of

of them never do, and is at the ſame time a flaming perſecutor of the proteſtants, can impart ſuch powers as will conſtitute a man a true miniſter of the goſpel. But the moſt ardent prayers and ſolemn benedictions of the proteſtant divines abroad, or of ſuch men as were Doddridge, and Watts, Leland, and Chandler at home, cannot in the leaſt effect this, or obtain the bleſſing of God in ſuch a work.

Thus much of the doctrine of ordination as taught and practiſed in the epiſcopal eſtabliſhment of England. The abſurdity, uncharitableneſs and evil conſequences of it, as making ſuch a wall of partition between proteſtants, will not greatly recommend it to any of thoſe ſerious and conſiderate perſons, who place religion in ſomething better than mere forms and outward appearances.

The Preſbyterians in Scotland, and thoſe of their perſuaſion, when that form of government was predominant in England, would have thought any man an intruder into the ſacred office, on whom the hands of the preſbytery had not been laid, accompanied with their prayers. The advocates for that form on this ſide the Tweed, (whether or no their northern brethren were of the ſame opinion I cannot ſay) as they acknowledged every Biſhop to be a Preſbyter, eſteemed epiſcopal ordination valid, only affirming that it was more regular and ſcriptural for ſeveral to engage in the act. The epiſcopalians however would

have it that the order of Biſhops was ſuperior to, and diſtinct from, the order of Preſbyters or elders; but their antagoniſts could bring pretty hard arguments from the ſcripture to the contrary. St. Paul calls the elders, i. e. the preſbyters of the church of Epheſus, and charges them *to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghoſt had made them Biſhops.* Acts xx. 27, 28. Our tranſlators, moſt probably leſt this plain proof ſhould be too obvious to the common people, have rendered the original word, *overſeers.* It is a leading opinion of the epiſcopalians that there can be but one Biſhop in a church, ſince there can be but one head over one body. St. Paul, however, unluckily for their ſcheme, directs his epiſtle to the Philippians, *to the ſaints that are at Philippi, with the Biſhops and Deacons,* from whence it appears that there were ſeveral bearing the ſame office, not that there was one ſuperior to all the reſt. The church at Jeruſalem was once the only chriſtian one in the world, in which all the apoſtles were fixed for a time, having been appointed Biſhops by our Lord himſelf. This fact therefore makes directly againſt thoſe who affirm that there can be no well-conſtituted church without a governor in chief. St. Paul ſays to Titus, chap. i. 5—7. *For this cauſe left I thee in Crete, that thou ſhouldeſt ordain elders in every city, for a Biſhop muſt be blameleſs.* The whole paſſage is certainly a connected one, only the ſame officers are differently named,

each

each meaning the ſame. To this purpoſe alſo St. Peter, 1 Ep. v. 1, 2. *The elders amongſt you I exhort, who alſo am an elder, feed the flock of God which is amongſt you, taking the overſight thereof*; i. e. in the original greek, *performing the office of Biſhops*. Thus are theſe texts underſtood by many of the primitive fathers likewiſe, whoſe authority always has great weight with the epiſcopal party, when they favour their own notions. Our firſt reformers alſo were of the ſame mind, confeſſing that the ſuperiority of Biſhops to Preſbyters was a human invention, not founded on ſcripture, but the laws of the realm. But this is not the only inſtance in which the clergy have departed from the doctrines of thoſe who delivered us from popiſh ſuperſtitions. They have however too often appeared more deſirous of going back again into the old darkneſs, than advancing farther towards the light. It appeared to be a uſurpation when one aſſumed to himſelf thoſe rights in the church which were common to all, and a great and manifeſt abſurdity when the care not only of ſeveral pariſhes, but of ſeveral counties was committed to one man, who, ſo far from being able to inſtruct the flock, could not with the utmoſt diligence acquaint himſelf with the abilities, or even with the perſons of many of the clergy his inferior delegates. Much of a Biſhop's time, as matters now ſtand, muſt be ſpent in London, attending in parliament or at court; and it is but few who are ſo lucky as to get a

rich ſee at firſt, and fewer deficient in that epiſcopal quality *(pious ſouls)* of longing for a tranſlation. Thus it frequently happens that before they are ſettled to their liking they grow old and unfit for ſervice. The government of the church by preſbyters, or by one called a a Biſhop whoſe dioceſe ſhould be of very ſmall extent, and all the miniſters of it aſſiſting in ſpiritual duties under him as their head, was thought even by ſome of the friends of epiſcopacy, a more ſcriptural and rational ſcheme, more conducive to the good of the church, and the deſign of a goſpel miniſtry. This was propoſed by Archbiſhop Uſher, a man whom all parties agreed to revere, and moſt of the Preſbyterians would readily have come into it. Our Lord's having choſen twelve apoſtles and ſeventy whom he called diſciples, who were ſent upon the ſame errand and inveſted with the ſame powers, afforded no juſt pretence for always keeping up in the church, without any command from the great author of our religion, two diſtinct offices, one of them only having the right to ordain teachers and paſtors. It was alſo apparent beyond contradiction that Timothy was ordained not by St. Paul alone, but by the laying on of the hands of the preſbytery. 1 Tim. iv. 14. Thus a great ſtir was made about, who were the proper perſons to lay hands on a man and qualify him for the miniſtry, whilſt one maxim which might have ſet all right was forgotten. *When the deſign for which a cuſtom was*

firſt

firſt inſtituted, is no longer anſwered, the cuſtom itſelf ſhould be laid aſide as uſeleſs. Ordination with the impoſition of the apoſtles hands conferred extraordinary gifts, and miraculous powers, on thoſe thus appointed by them. When the religion of Jeſus was thoroughly proved to be from God, and joyfully received by thouſands in various parts of the world, there was then no more occaſion for miracles to be wrought in confirmation of it, and therefore the laying on of hands, which was the means of conferring ſuch gifts, ought to have ceaſed with them. *Anointing the ſick with oil*, is preſcribed James v. 14. and when *the apoſtles laid hands on the ſick they recovered*; but ſince no ſuch effects follow from theſe practices now, they are diſuſed by the general conſent of Proteſtants. For the ſame reaſon every ceremony not anſwering the original intention ſhould be laid aſide alſo. It is a clear point that neither the hands of a Biſhop, or of a whole preſbytery, can make a man more wiſe, more holy, or more capable of diſcharging the duties of his profeſſion. The ceremony has a great tendency to promote ſuperſtition in the people and pride in miniſters; and indeed the grand objection to preſbyterian government was, that inſtead of a Biſhop in a dioceſe, there would be one in every pariſh, ſuppoſed to be inveſted with powers, which an artful man might plead as a reaſon why a great degree of reverence ſhould be paid him. The ſuppoſition of ſome ſacred

gifts reſiding in a paſtor, which he of himſelf or jointly with his brethren could confer upon others, paved the way for miniſters to become lords over the conſciences of men, inſtead of being helpers of their joy.

The doctrine of the Independants concerning ordination, is more rational than either, though that had too much of the old leaven in it. They rightly affirmed, that ſuch as have the benefit of the ſcripture, any company of people, agreeing in the principles of truth, as they find them there declared, may conſtitute amongſt themſelves a church without the authority of any other; and may chuſe to themſelves a paſtor, who is thus fully authorized to adminiſter the ordinances of religion. It is alſo their opinion that in a church ſo conſtituted, any gifted brother, if he finds himſelf qualified, may inſtruct, exhort, and preach in the church, though, as not having the paſtoral office, ſuch a one cannot adminiſter the ſacraments. Their ſcheme will be more perfect, when they allow a gifted brother to do the latter as well as the former; and it is much to be wondered at, that they have not before now advanced thus far.

Theſe are diſputes which have divided the miniſters of religion, and ſadly perplexed the laity. The epiſcopalians aſſured the people with great confidence, that if they ſeparated from the eſtabliſhed church they were guilty of ſchiſm, that ſchiſm was a damnable ſin, and that they had no reaſon to expect the bleſſing

bleſſing of God on the worſhip performed, or the ordinances adminiſtered in a meeting-houſe. The Preſbyterians in Scotland were equally warm againſt the hierarchy; all that joined with the prelates were, according to them, the companions of the *beaſt*, and would be deſtroyed as the enemies of God. Here indeed that party was much more moderate, they were inclined to healing meaſures, and earneſtly ſtrove to unite with the Biſhops on terms, which, conſidering their reaſonableneſs and the promiſes made them at the reſtoration and the revolution, to the bringing about which important events they greatly contributed, ought in gratitude to have been accepted, even if repeated promiſes might have been diſpenſed with.

To the obligations of gratitude and truth, the majority of the epiſcopal party proved to be ſtrangers, and bitterly oppoſed the comprehenſion they had given the diſſenters reaſon to expect, grudging them in a little time even the ſmall favour of a partial toleration. This treatment; together with the ſharp ſpeeches and bitter reflections of the church party, led the diſſenters into a more thorough diſlike of their principles. There were many plauſible arguments to be urged againſt the government of the church by Biſhops, eſpecially as conſtituted here after the model of the popiſh countries. It was thought an antichriſtian uſurpation; to govern the church well in this manner, an impoſſibility, and

therefore it was repreſented by them as the duty of all Chriſtians, however charitably they might think of particular members, to ſhew an open diſlike of the conſtitution itſelf. The Independants charged both with departing from the primitive purity, and being convinced that their own was the apoſtolical method, wanted all parties to adopt it. That it was a duty incumbent upon Chriſtians to attend the public inſtitutions of religion ſomewhere, was an acknowledged point; but it was not eaſy for a plain, honeſt layman to determine where to fix, ſince ſuch ſtreſs was laid by one party, not upon the improvement that might be received from a miniſter, but upon the right of that miniſter to exerciſe his office at all. This notion was treated by others as a ſhameful monopolizing of the divine bleſſing, as well as a departure from the primitive purity, both which faults Chriſtians were loudly called upon carefully to avoid. Happy would it have been, if all had examined the ſcriptures, not to find their own notions there, but firſt of all to have conſidered what it ſaid, and then to have formed their notions accordingly! This would have removed all uneaſineſs from good minds. They would have learnt that it was not this or that ſet of miniſters to whom the right of adminiſtring goſpel ordinances appertained, but that every private Chriſtian might engage in the ſame acts, with the approbation of God, and to the edification of his brethren. Being once

once perſuaded of this, they could no longer be perplexed about uninterrupted ſucceſſions, irregular miniſtrations, invalid ordinances, &c, but without the leaſt uneaſineſs would have joined thoſe churches, whatever denominated, where moral and religious improvement could be beſt attained.

Our Lord choſe twelve Apoſtles, and ſeventy Diſciples, to whom he gave commiſſion to inſtruct men in the principles of his religion, and power to work miracles to confirm its truth. When he aſcended on high, like a triumphant conqueror, he gave gifts unto men, ſome he made Apoſtles, who were to travel from place to place, and preach the goſpel of the kingdom. This title though in general confined to ſuch as were immediately ſent by Chriſt himſelf, yet may be given to any who go upon the ſame errand to the nations who are ignorant of him. Our Biſhops call themſelves their ſucceſſors, but without the leaſt propriety. The offices are quite diſtinct; the one ought to take upon him the care of ſome particular church, and ſtatedly to reſide amongſt the flock; the other ſhould be confined to no one charge, but go from place to place, preaching the goſpel where it is not known, or groſsly corrupted. He who having been employed in this manner for a time, at length devotes himſelf to the ſervice of one flock, ceaſes to be an Apoſtle and becomes a Biſhop. Any layman who ſhall faithfully endeavour to convert a heathen or mahometan nation by propagating

the goſpel amongſt them, would be deſerving of that noble appellation, which is only given to Biſhops, by the *courteſy* of the Chriſtian world, (if I may ſo expreſs myſelf) but with no more propriety than an impious and raſcally nobleman is entitled Your Grace, or The Right Honourable. Our Lord alſo gave ſome to be prophets, who foretold future events. Acts xx. 21.—xv. 32.—xiii. 1. And ſome Evangeliſts, who were ſent with the tidings of great joy, and to finiſh what the Apoſtles had begun, Acts xix. 22. 2 Tim. iv. 5; and ſome, ſettled paſtors and teachers. Theſe, under the name of elders (i. e. Preſbyters) and Biſhops, took the care of particular churches, devoting their time and labour to the ſervice of them. In this enumeration of eccleſiaſtical officers, there is no diſtinct mention made of Biſhops, and for this plain reaſon, that they are included under the name of paſtors and teachers; which proves that there were no ſuch ſuperiours amongſt their brethren in the apoſtolic times, and conſequently that there ought to be none now.

But, though diſtinct offices are mentioned in the New Teſtament, there is no part of religious duty or worſhip there recommended which every ſober, virtuous and pious layman, is not as fully authorized to perform, as that perſon who is ordained either by a Biſhop, a Preſbytery, after the independant manner, or by every one of them. The duties of a chriſtian miniſter are to reprove and exhort

thoſe with whom he is ſpiritually connected; to viſit and comfort the ſick and afflicted; to pray in the public aſſemblies; to explain the ſcripture, and preach the truths of it; to baptize, and adminiſter the holy ordinance of the Lord's ſupper. Now there is not one of theſe duties, which every layman may not lawfully perform*, and it would be much to the credit of religion if ſuch would qualify themſelves for it, by ſtudying the word of God, acquainting themſelves with the arguments and motives

* This is no new doctrine. The author of that maſterly performance, 'The Rights of the Chriſtian Church,' advanced it long ago. His arguments on *this head* are not the worſe, on account of his afterwards proving an enemy to Chriſtianity itſelf. In his *Rights of the Church*, there is that ſtrong, manly, nervous reaſoning which forces conviction, mixed with ſuch reflections upon the conduct of thoſe againſt whom he wrote, as give life and ſpirit to the work, and which thoſe who know the characters and deſigns of the eccleſiaſtics of that time, will not think too harſh and ſevere. In his *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*, the queſtion is never properly ſtated, good arguments are miſapplied, objections to ſcripture which had been often anſwered are advanced as new, and a ſenſe put upon many paſſages to make them appear abſurd, which a writer of his abilities and knowledge muſt have known to be falſe, and contrary to the intention of the inſpired penmen. It is a pity that talents ſo fitted for the ſervice of mankind ſhould have been employed to undermine the foundations of that hope and joy, which alone can excite to a worthy conduct and behaviour. But Tindal, like many others of fine abilities, was an immoral man, and indulged his ſenſual appetites. To ſuch a one neither the purity of the goſpel morals, could be agreeable, nor the fear of its awful threatenings, ſupportable. Happy would it have been for him, had he been as virtuous as he was learned! but, not having the reſolution to withſtand temptations, like many others he wandered into the gloomy regions of infidelity.

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of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, and by cultivating a devotional frame and temper.

With regard to reproof and exhortation, it is a duty incumbent on all, tho' neglected by moſt. It was a command delivered to the Jews, amongſt many others of great importance, *thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy brother, and not ſuffer ſin upon him*, Lev. xix. 17. And Malachi iii. 16. *Thoſe are highly commended who feared the Lord, and talked often to one another. They ſhall be mine ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, in the day when I make up my jewels, and I will ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own ſon that ſerveth him.* Chriſtians are repeatedly charged in the New Teſtament *to reprove, exhort*, and *comfort one another*; and if a clergyman of any denomination walketh diſorderly, it is as much the duty of his people to reprove him, as it is incumbent on a worthy miniſter to rebuke any of them.

As Chriſtians we are all brethren. The man who, on account of his natural and acquired abilities, is principally diſtinguiſhed in a church, ought not on this account to think himſelf above being reproved and exhorted, but to receive it with meekneſs. Private perſons have often times better opportunities for giving reproof and exhortation, than miniſters, ſince that may be taken kind in the former which would be thought aſſuming in the latter. The moſt convenient opportunities ought to be embraced; thoſe ſeaſons when men are moſt apt to be wrought upon; when they

they are in private and when they are cool, ſo that our reproofs may not look like reviling, or ſerve only to enrage them. Many cannot bear to be told of their faults, the office requires great delicacy; but it is poſſible, in the courſe of converſation, to inſinuate reproofs in ſo gentle a manner, that none but a very bad man would be offended, and yet ſo plainly as that every one unleſs very ſtupid will perceive the deſign. But ſurely no miniſter will affirm, nor would any layman aſſent to it, that all ability to convey neceſſary reproof and inſtruction, with delicacy and force, is confined to any particular order whatſoever.

If any of our fellow creatures are in diſtreſs and affliction, if ſickneſs and pain torment their bodies, or bitter reflections on an ill ſpent life their minds, do not compaſſion and benevolence oblige every man to adminiſter the balm of conſolation? From whence can the beſt remedies be drawn, but from the word of God, which is open to all, and which every man ought to underſtand. Whoever is acquainted with the leading principles of religion, and capable of aſſiſting the devotions of others, by offering up a ſolemn prayer to the father of mercies, ſuch a perſon, whether man or woman, is more fit to viſit the ſick and afflicted, than vaſt numbers of thoſe who would appropriate this office ſolely to themſelves, as if the perſon that ſpoke, and not the thing ſpoken was to be the ſervice of conſolation. All diſſenting miniſters, are per-

fectly agreed in this; as to our brethren of the eſtabliſhment, it cannot be expected that they will approve of it. They aſſume to themſelves a power which belongeth to God only, and ſolemnly declare that they have an authority committed to them, which was never beſtowed on any man whatſoever. The Apoſtles had a commiſſion to preach the goſpel, and to declare to thoſe who would ſubmit to the terms of it, that their ſins ſhould be forgiven, and conſequently that thoſe who would not their ſins ſhould be retained, and render them liable to condemnation. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts ii. 38. xiii. 38, 39. But where can we find, that if a man in the expectation of death profeſſes a great ſorrow for his wickedneſs, and humbly and heartily deſires to be abſolved, and what wretch ſo abandoned as would not deſire this? I ſay where ſhall we find the ſhadow of an argument to prove, that an authority is committed to any one to abſolve ſuch a perſon, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt? The divines of the church of England, are of very different opinions with regard to this matter. Some of them roundly aſſert that ſuch an authority is lodged with them. Others excuſe the form, by ſaying in direct contradiction to the literal and expreſs meaning of the words, that they are to be regarded rather as a prayer than a declaration. But Doctor Stebbing, a zealous churchman, Dean Tucker, the ingenious modern defender of the articles, with

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ſome others, give up the matter as not capable of a rational vindication. This office however is retained in the Book of Common Prayer, to all and every thing in which the clergy give their ſolemn aſſent and conſent, and that they do willingly and *ex animo* ſubſcribe to it, as containing nothing contrary to the word of God. It raiſes my indignation when reading the works of men of approved piety and moderation, to find ſo many compliments paid to the ſervice of the church as all noble and rational, whilſt repeated ſtrokes of ſatire are levelled at the enthuſiaſm of the Diſſenters; yet every Biſhop pretends to be able to convey a power to every clergyman, whom he ordains, which I never heard that any Quaker warmed with the apprehenſion of being inſpired, or any Methodiſt in the heat and fury of religious zeal ever pretended to. The Pope himſelf lays claim to nothing higher than this; and as to all the proteſtant ſects in the kingdom, if every mad and enthuſiaſtical notion adopted by them was put into one ſcale, and this office of the church into another, it would be more than an overbalance for all. If a man then will venture to indulge his vicious and wicked inclinations, hoping to get rid of the burden all at once when he can enjoy them no longer, he muſt apply to a prieſt of the church of England. It is no matter how debauched, immoral, or ignorant, the ſaid prieſt may be in himſelf; if the ſacred hands of ſome Biſhop have been laid on him,

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that is enough. He can then do that, if the eſtabliſhed doctrine be true, which was juſtly thought of old to be the ſole prerogative of God. But if ſerious converſation, good inſtructions, and fervent prayer can adminiſter eaſe to the mind, and are the means appointed by God to give ſome relief to the troubled breaſt, why ſhould miniſters only be applied to?

As to praying in public, of this we have full aſſurance, *that God heareth not ſinners*, and therefore will not regard the prayers of an immoral miniſter; *but if any man*, it makes no difference whether he be a miniſter or layman, *be a worſhipper of God and doth his will, him he heareth*, John ix. 31. Having this aſſurance, a whole Chriſtian aſſembly may chearfully join with him, who, being of a holy converſation, has likewiſe cultivated this divine gift, ſo as to be able to lead the devotions of others.

Whoever has a clear, diſtinct and audible voice, with a proper knowledge of the pauſes that ought to be made, and the places where an emphaſis ſhould be laid, can certainly read the ſcriptures to others to their great edification. It is proper for thoſe who undertake to explain it to have ſome acqauintance with the original; this qualification numbers of the laity have. Such as have it not may ſuggeſt ſome uſeful reflections and obſervations, adapted to the improvement even of thoſe whoſe knowledge may lie deeper.

Preaching

Preaching is nothing more than diſcourſing on ſome doctrine or duty, explaining its nature, and enforcing it by proper motives. It is alſo very proper that the Sermon delivered ſhould be of the preacher's own compoſition. Upon occaſion indeed a printed Sermon may be read to advantage; but was this always the caſe, the people would be more apt than now, to make excuſes for abſenting themſelves from the public aſſemblies, and ſay they ſhould only hear, what might be eaſily purchaſed. Inſtructions ſuited to every particular circumſtance and ſeaſon, cannot be eaſily obtained in any public collections of Sermons; but a diligent paſtor will ſoon diſcover what ſubjects and what manner of treating them will be moſt uſeful to the people, and if they are tolerably handled, it will excite that attention, which he will never obtain, who is only ſuppoſed to be reading the compoſition of another. But if the ſtated miniſter of an audience be abſent, or prevented by ſickneſs from performing his duty, and another of like qualifications is not at hand, then for ſome member of the congregation to read a ſermon, or ſome expoſition of ſcripture, becomes a duty; and if any are capable of profiting the church by delivering compoſitions of their own, the dignity of public worſhip is kept up, and its intentions fully anſwered. This is often practiſed in ſome diſſenting congregations, but, without any ſhadow of reaſon,

utterly forbidden in the eſtabliſhed church.* But whatever alterations have been made ſince, the office of preaching was, in the Apoſtle's days, common to all. St. Paul ſuppoſes it to be every man's duty to ſpeak what might tend to edification in the public aſſemblies. *Let us conſider one another, to provoke unto love and good works, not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together as the manner of ſome is, but exhorting one another.* Heb. x. 24, 25. So Heb. iii. 13. *Exhort one another daily whilſt it is called to-day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* This does not refer merely to private exhortation; for it is plain from 1 Cor. xiv. that liberty was given to all to preach or prophecy, which though it occaſioned great diſorder, the Apoſtle was for continuing the practice, only giving them ſome rules of order and decency, and forbidding the women to ſpeak, in whom it does not ſeem becoming to ſet up for public inſtructors of the men, however capable they may be to do it in private. If it be ſaid that theſe perſons had a right to ſpeak, being divinely inſpired, to which none can now pretend; it may be anſwered this does not appear to have been the caſe in all the circumſtances here referred to, and ſuppoſing

* Several Colleges in the Univerſities, may oblige a Maſter of Arts, whether in orders or not, to preach in their reſpective chapels. At leaſt this was once a cuſtom, whether it be continued or not.

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it was; the Laity are now inſpired, as much as the miniſters. The latter can only declare what they think to be the truth upon a ſerious and careful examination; and ſurely the former can do this likewiſe. The notion therefore that the ſpeakers in the primitive church were inſpired, is no objection to what is here advanced. All are *now* on a level in this reſpect. The famous Origen, in the primitive times, before his ordination, being at Cæſarea, was deſired by the Biſhops of that province to expound the ſcriptures publickly in that church, and to inſtruct the people in their preſence; with which requeſt he complied. One Demetrius, another Biſhop, wrote to theſe Prelates, and told them it was a thing unheard of, and had never been practiſed till then, that laymen ſhould preach in the preſence of Biſhops: To which the others replied, that "this had been often practiſed." The meſſage of Demetrius ſeemed to be an acknowledgment that laymen might exhort one another in public; and the anſwer of the others, "that Biſhops might attend to them "without diminiſhing from their ſpiritual dig-"nity." As it therefore appears agreeable to reaſon, and is confirmed by ſcripture, that the Laity may reprove and exhort, viſit the ſick, comfort the afflicted, read and explain the ſcriptures, lead the public devotions, and (as the paſſage of antient hiſtory juſt quoted teſtifies was not uncommon) preach to the people, and even to their paſtors themſelves,

ſo it follows that they may adminiſter the poſitive ordinances. Surely the man who can feed the flock of Chriſt with wholeſome inſtructions, and offer up prayers and praiſes acceptable to God, may ſprinkle water on the face of an infant, or plunge into it the body of an adult. This is ſomething very inferior to preaching the goſpel, as appears from St. Paul's arguing 1 Cor. i. 14. 16. The Apoſtles were commanded to baptize, i. e. to ſee to it that the rite was adminiſtered; but whether they did it themſelves, or ordered others to do it, was not material. Cornelius and his houſehold, who were the firſt fruits of the gentiles, were not baptized by St. Peter though he himſelf was preſent, but by certain brethren who came with him. Acts x. 47, 48. Many in Samaria were baptized by Philip the Deacon, who had no other office in the church but that of taking care of the poor. Acts viii. 12. It is plain that it was not the Apoſtle Philip, becauſe all the Apoſtles remained at Jeruſalem, ver. 1. and Peter and John came down to beſtow on them thoſe extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, which Philip himſelf, not being an Apoſtle, was unable to confer. St. Paul himſelf, the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles, was baptized by Ananias, who was a layman for any thing that we know. The Clergy for many years allowed the validity of Baptiſm, not only when adminiſtered by laymen, but even by boys. Witneſs the famous ſtory related of

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Athanaſius (that Saint whoſe memory is ſo highly revered, and his creed ſtill repeated in the church, to the great edification of men of plain underſtandings, and the promotion of Chriſtian charity) that when a boy and at play with other lads, he baptized ſeveral of them, which, upon a ſolemn debate, was eſteemed valid by the Biſhop of Alexandria and his clergy. This may ſerve to ſilence thoſe, who lay a great ſtreſs upon the authority of Fathers.*

Eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of the death of Chriſt, which is by many deemed the moſt ſolemn act of our holy religion, and expreſsly commanded to be always continued in the church, may be adminiſtered by any Chriſtian, nor can I recollect one paſſage of ſcripture from which it may be inferred that a miniſter only can do it. In what does the act conſiſt? The prayers which are offered up to God will be accepted if they are the tribute of a ſincere heart. To think that any virtue is imparted to the elements by them is mere ſuperſtition; and ſurely it little matters who delivers the bread or the wine to him who receives it. A prieſt of the church of England, ſtands at the table within the rails, to the outſide of which only the laity

* Athanaſius was born of heathen parents, and I have ſomewhere ſeen it affirmed, that he was a heathen at the time of baptizing his play-fellows, who alſo being Heathens baptized him; if ſo, it muſt have been in ſport and deriſion, and thus commenced this great Saint's Chriſtianity.

can approach, and with his own hands he delivers the elements to each perſon. Amongſt the Diſſenters, if the number of communicants be large, ſome of the Laity together with the miniſter perform this part of the office, and it is often handed from one to another. There is nothing in the nature, in the deſign, or in the original ſcriptural mode of performing this ordinance of religion, but what every good man is capable of anſwering and doing, and the confining it entirely to an ordained miniſter or any miniſter, is a cuſtom neither grounded on reaſon or ſcripture.

Tertullian, a very ancient father,* ſays, That the diſtinction between the clergy and the laity was owing to the church; that otherwiſe laymen might exerciſe the prieſtly office; and that where three are gathered together in Chriſt's name, there is a church, though three laymen; it being the will of God that at all times we ſhould be capable of the Sacraments.

Happy would it have been for the Chriſtian world, if the laity had always aſſerted thoſe rights which were theirs from the beginning. Artful prieſts could not then have impoſed

* I do not pretend to any acquaintance with the fathers myſelf, and only quote them from others; neither does their authority weigh in the leaſt with me; but their teſtimony may be received as to matters of fact as well as that of other perſons. Such however as hold them in high eſtimation, ought not to be ſevere upon the publiſhers of any doctrine which may be proved and defended from their writings.

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what doctrines they pleaſed, and made all the people ſtand in awe of them. Kings and Princes would never have trembled at the name of a debauched, Atheiſtical, worthleſs old Prieſt, reſiding at Rome, nor have been obliged to make the meaneſt ſubmiſſions to Biſhops and eccleſiaſtics of their own ſubjects, whom they had raiſed from the very duſt. Who can read, without indignation, of the groſs inſults which our King Henry II. the greateſt Prince of his age, received from Becket whom he had raiſed to the Archbiſhoprick of Canterbury? Yet he could not venture to puniſh that rebellious ſubject according to the forms of law; and when four of his attendants, zealous for the honour of their Sovereign, too raſhly murdered this traitor, he, the King, being ſuppoſed acceſſary to it, was not ſafe even on his throne, until he went to Canterbury, and after walking barefooted to Becket's tomb, received eighty laſhes with rods from the hands of vile Monks. King John, who appears from his hiſtory not to have been entirely deſtitute of ſpirit, by inſiſting upon the right of nominating a Biſhop to the See of Lincoln, enraged the Clergy againſt him, and though he puniſhed ſome of them for their inſolence, yet at length he was obliged to lay his crown and other enſigns of royalty at the feet of the Pope's Legate, and to ſign a charter, whereby he reſigned to the Pope the Kingdom of England and Lordſhip of Ire-

land, and this was for a long time after treated as a conquered country.

Pope Alexander III. in the moſt public manner ſet his foot upon the neck of the Emperor, Frederic I. And Henry IV. Emperor of Germany, not chuſing to govern his ſubjects according to the will of the Pope, Gregory VII, was forced to lay aſide his imperial robes, and put on a coarſe frock, waiting barefooted three whole days in the month of January, faſting from morning to night, before that haughty prieſt would admit him to his preſence. This tyranny, which oppreſſed the whole Chriſtian world for many centuries, could never have been uſurped, had not the Laity yielded up their right of being themſelves the miniſters of religious ordinances to the Prieſts, who were all the ſworn ſubjects of the Pope. Againſt him if any Prince dared to move his tongue, he was anathematized, excommunicated, and, if that did not make him ſubmit, his dominions were laid under an interdict, which put a ſtop to religious ſervices of every kind; the deluded people thinking themſelves to be in danger of damnation, were exaſperated againſt their heretical prince, who was obliged to comply with the terms impoſed upon them by the Pope and the clergy, or loſe his crown and his life. Did not the members of our preſent eſtabliſhment imagine that there was ſomewhat ſacred in the prieſt himſelf, which rendered

dered all religious acts peculiarly efficacious, they would never attend on ſuch as are often impoſed upon them, but aſſerting the rights of Chriſtians, and the purity of their holy religion, would never give the leaſt countenance to thoſe who are a diſgrace to it, by joining in the devotions of which they take the lead, or receiving the ordinances from their polluted hands; if *ſome* * of the Epiſcopalians of ſome of the American Colonies had not imbibed this abſurd notion, they would never ſend their miniſters, at great expence and hazard, to receive thoſe gifts from the hands of our Biſhops, which they have not to beſtow. And if thoſe Biſhops who encourage them to come on ſuch idle expeditions † were not under the power of ſome ſtrange deluſion, or in a conſpiracy to promote Biſhops contrary to the common ſenſe of mankind, that money which was deſigned to propagate the Goſpel amongſt the heathen natives of America, would not be applied to the ſervice of their own particular party. For it is a well known fact, that in towns where there is a Preſbyterian, or an Independant church, a miſſionary is placed to draw away

* I ſay, ſome of the epiſcopalians, uſing it as a general name for thoſe who approve the doctrines and the liturgy of the church of England; many of whom, both miniſters and people, have publickly declared their diſapprobation of the ſcheme of placing Biſhops amongſt them.

† The Dutch, ſettled at New York, are alſo weak enough to ſend their young miniſters to Amſterdam, to be ordained by the Preſbyterian claſs there.

ſome from their congregations, whilſt places which have not the goſpel in any ſhape are left deſtitute; and the bringing of one from any of the Proteſtant ſects to the Epiſcopal church, is made as much a matter of triumph as the converſion of a Heathen. Nay farther, thoſe who are perfectly acquainted with American affairs, have aſſerted, that in New England, where every perſon pays tithes to the miniſter on whom he chuſes to attend, there are miſſionaries entirely maintained by the ſociety for propagating the goſpel, who perſuade three or four families to leave other churches, promiſing to refund them half of that allowance which the law obliges all to pay to ſome miniſter or other.

Indeed, charity almoſt obliges one to believe, though it be contrary to what they often profeſs, that the Right Reverends do not think the ſpiritual endowments they beſtow to be of of any great value. Is it poſſible that they could ſuffer ſuch a large extent of country to be without churches, without the means of ſalvation, if they thought themſelves really capable of putting them in a ſtate ſo neceſſary to their beſt intereſts, as an alteration in theſe particulars? certainly one out of twenty-ſix would croſs the ſea to convey ſpiritual bleſſings to thouſands; and what would the diſpleaſure (ſuppoſing it was incurred, which it very poſſibly might not) of our civil governors be, in the eſtimation of a ſucceſſor of thoſe apoſtles, who, to promote the happineſs of their fellow-

creatures,

creatures, gave up every private gratification, expoſed themſelves to ſufferings the moſt dreadful to human nature, and remain upon record as examples of what the faithful miniſters of Chriſt ought, and if called to it will be ready, to undergo? Surely they ſucceed not to the apoſtles in any apoſtolical qualities, or they are convinced that they cannot confer what they pretend. However, claiming to themſelves the ſole power of ordination, confirmation, &c. makes them appear of conſequence to thoſe who believe them, and affords an opportunity of ſetting ſome of their oppoſers in an odious light;* thus keeping up old animoſities, which will never entirely be forgotten, till the laity

* One of the Right Reverend Bench, always preaches a ſermon once a year at Bow Church before the ſociety for propagating the goſpel, when the unhappy caſe of the American churches, deſtitute of a biſhop, is lamentably deplored, and much of the blame laid on the Engliſh diſſenters, who have neither power nor inclination to prevent one under that character from being ſent. They indeed think it would be rather hard that the deſcendants from thoſe whom the cruel perſecutions of former biſhops, in the reigns of the Stuarts, drove from their country and friends to the then ſavage fields of the weſtern world, ſhould have the ſame ſort of men ſent amongſt them with the ſame powers. They would never object to a biſhop to ordain and confirm thoſe of the epiſcopal perſuaſion, without being expenſive or troubleſome to thoſe of another communion, which, though it is all our biſhops pretend to deſire, yet they have given pretty broad hints that this would not entirely ſatisfy them. It is rather irkſome to be obliged to repeat what hath been often ſo much better ſaid on this ſubject, particularly by Dr. Furneaux in his excellent letters to Judge Blackſtone, and in the Appendix to the Two ſpirited Letters to the Biſhops; but till the latter are aſhamed of bringing ſuch falſe accuſations, others muſt ſtoop ſo low as to anſwer them.

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can be perſuaded to free themſelves from all prieſtly uſurpations whatſoever.

If diſſenters themſelves were not too ſuperſtitious, thoſe who love the intereſt would not be grieved at ſeeing ſo many places ſhut up for want of being able to maintain a miniſter, when one of the laity might be fixed upon by the congregation, or ſeveral of them engage alternately in performing the public ſervices, and thus a church be kept up, as often happens amongſt the Quakers when there are not more than two families in a town. Nor would the Lord's Supper be neglected, as in ſome places, for want of a ſtated ordained paſtor, did Chriſtians conſider, that the man who is qualified to be their inſtructor, and to take the lead in their devotions, is as proper for *all* the purpoſes of religion as for that particular one.

A colony of four or five hundred may poſſibly embark for ſome diſtant part of the world, where a Chriſtian church was never ſettled before; the miniſter whom they take with them dies, and another cannot be procured for a long time. Is this colony then no more to aſſemble as a religious ſociety, and partake of the Chriſtian ordinances? On the ſtrict epiſcopalian principles it would be impoſſible; whoever was choſen could not be, according to their ſentiments, a ſucceſſor of the apoſtles, nor could the people give him any power in ſpirituals. If they were diſſenters, ſome of them might be perhaps a little uneaſy to have their children baptized by an unordained miniſter, and make

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ſome ſcruple of joining in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. But ſurely reaſon, and arguments plainly deducible from ſcripture, would inform us, that any ſerious man whom the reſt ſhould chooſe for their paſtor, would by their prayers be as properly ordained to the work, as if it had the concurrence of the whole college of Apoſtles.

It is a peculiar happineſs of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, that the duties required are more valuable as exerciſes of the heart, than labours of the head. The meaneſt Chriſtian can therefore judge whether or no a man is qualified for the miniſtry; ſince it is not a learned harangue which is the one thing needful, but to ſpeak powerfully and feelingly to the heart and conſcience. If all applied themſelves as they ought to the ſtudy of the Book of God, they might eaſily diſcover whether it was the preachers chief deſign to build them up in faith and holineſs, or to perplex their minds with thoſe controverſies and ſtrifes of words, which have no tendency either to make men wiſer or better, but promote bigotry, uncharitableneſs, conceit, and lead numbers into a belief, that being zealous for opinions is of higher importance than practicing the plain duties of religion. Chriſtians are ſuppoſed, by the inſpired writers, to be proper judges of a miniſter's abilities for public ſervice, and are therefore exhorted *to take heed what they hear, to beware of falſe prophets; not to believe every ſpirit, but to try the ſpirits.*

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The members of the Church at Coloſſe are commanded by the Apoſtle to exhort Archippus (who probably had been negligent), *to take heed to his miniſtry, and to fulfil it.* If the people are to judge of what diſqualifies a man for his work, they can alſo judge what it is that fits any one for it; and *their choice*, not the impoſition of hands by a Biſhop or a Preſbytery, conſtitutes him their miniſter, and fully authorizes him to diſcharge all the duties of it. Under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, the Prieſts only had a right to offer ſacrifices, and to aſſiſt in the temple-ſervice; and there was a holy of holies into which the high Prieſt was admitted, and that but once a year. But ſince Chriſt our great high Prieſt is gone into the holieſt of all, even into the more immediate preſence of the ever-bleſſed God, Chriſtians may follow him, and in his name offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices to the Father of all. We need not conſtitute one to approach in our ſtead to the ſupreme Majeſty: Chriſt Jeſus is the way, and through him the meaneſt Chriſtian, whoſe heart is ſincere, has as near an acceſs to the throne of Grace, and as full aſſurance of being accepted, as the moſt diſtinguiſhed and exalted character. He hath made us unto our God, Kings and Prieſts. Rev. v. 10. *and all chriſtians are entitled a royal Prieſthood.* 1 Pet. ii. 9. The word Prieſt is never applied to the miniſters of religion in the new Teſtament, as diſtinct from the people; all make but one body, of which Chriſt

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is the head. Thoſe clergymen who call themſelves the Prieſthood, uſurp a title which does not belong to them, any more than to the moſt deſpiſed members of the church. This title lays all Chriſtians under the ſtrongeſt obligations to purity of character and holineſs of life. The Prieſts under the law were to be free from every blemiſh and bodily defect; and ſurely thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed by ſuch a name under a better diſpenſation, ought to pay a principal regard to that which will moſt effectually contribute to their obtaining the divine eſteem, for God looks to the excellency of the character and the good diſpoſitions of the ſoul. Chriſtians are not properly ſenſible of their dignity as ſuch; if they were, they would be more careful to adorn it, ſince it is a general opinion that the *Prieſthood* are under peculiar obligations to act conſiſtently with the precepts of the Goſpel. They would all be convinced that Prayers and Praiſes offered up to the ſupreme Being, by a ſerious and religious man, made a Prieſt unto God by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, are much more acceptable than his, who, deſtitute of true holineſs, hath nevertheleſs been ordained a Prieſt by men. If Chriſtians would aſſert theſe rights, immoral miniſters would be the objects of general ſcorn and contempt; they would be aſhamed any longer to arrogate to themſelves the name, and either amend their lives, or quit their profeſſions; the proof and exhortation being conſidered as general

duties would be more generally practiſed, and we ſhould all become more compleat patterns of good works. When the principles defended in the preceding pages are adopted, Popery and all ſpiritual tyranny will ſoon fall to the ground, and not before. During the three firſt centuries the religion of Jeſus, though oppoſed in the moſt violent manner, prevailed more and more, and the prophecy ſeemed to be then almoſt accompliſhed, "that it ſhould "fill the whole earth." But when the perſecution ceaſed, the laity neglected to examine the principles of their religion ſo carefully as they uſed to do, and artful deſigning men ſoon found that it would tend much to their advantage if they kept to themſelves the power of adminiſtering to them in ſpirituals. When once they had obtained this, it became eaſy for them to introduce what doctrines they pleaſed, till ſtep by ſtep they were advanced to the very ſummit of power, and the nobles and princes of the earth bowed down before them. It is happy for us, that the laity, our forefathers, took upon themſelves the care of altering the religious conſtitution of the church. But very few amongſt the clergy were willing to give up thoſe ſuperſtitions and abſurdities from which they derived ſuch ſtores of wealth. The people, whom they had plundered of it, juſtly thought they had a right to take it to themſelves again, or to direct to what purpoſes it ſhould be applied. And would the laity in Popiſh countries ſuffer themſelves

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any longer to be oppreſſed by a proud, luxurious prieſthood, if they were convinced that the powers they claim are nothing more than artful pretences to keep them in bondage? Expoſing the doctrines of tranſubſtantiation, purgatary, image-worſhip, penances, &c. is but lopping off the branches; but if the Laity would themſelves perform the duties of the Chriſtian prieſthood, it would be ſtriking at the very root of the evil. In the days of ignorance our Biſhops and the Clergy here perſuaded the people, that, by their prayers and exorciſms they could drive away the devil, purge their habitations from evil ſpirits, and ſecure them from the power of witches, enchanters, and all the inviſible enemies of mankind. It now appears plainly that theſe devils and ſpirits were all of their own raiſing; for, as credulity and ſuperſtition are greatly diminiſhed, we hear of no more ſuch exploits; and as there are no prieſts who can make a gain of driving away theſe infernals, we never find that they take up their beds amongſt us. With the ſame mixture of wonder and pity that we read of the folly of our anceſtors, men of conſideration have but little doubt that our poſterity will treat the notions as yet entertained, of the ſurpriſing powers conveyed by the Biſhop's laying his hands on thoſe who are ordained, or of the gifts and graces conveyed to ſuch as are confirmed.

Church-authority muſt in time be univerſally derided, and as vaſt revenues were taken away

from an idle, uſeleſs clergy at the reformation, ſo, if the laity are once convinced that all ſpiritual power is derived from them, the vaſt revenues of Biſhops and other dignitaries in the church will be much better beſtowed, in more equal proportions, upon ſuch as the people themſelves ſhall chuſe and ordain, and a large part of it may be applied to the ſupport of the poor, and the leſſening thoſe enormous taxes ſo heavy and burdenſome to the nation. It has been often pretended by the friends of the Hierarchy, that, conſidering there are ſo many poor livings in the kingdom, were it not for the attraction of ſome ſplendid and rich dignities, none of any genius and ability would be educated for the miniſtry. This is ſaying in other words, that God cannot ſupport his own cauſe, unleſs men will aſſiſt him by adding worldly motives. It would have been much better for the church, if thoſe whom it has tempted into its ſervice by the expectation of preſent diſtinctions and honours had never been born. What numbers of diligent, faithful, holy men devoted themſelves to preaching the Goſpel, when nothing but bonds, and impriſonment, and torture, and death awaited them? What proud, ſenſual, ambitious wretches, dedicated themſelves to what was called the work of the miniſtry, when riches and honours were annexed to the calling? That youth never ought to be educated for the peculiar ſervice of the church, who does not appear to be of a moſt devout

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and religious turn, more deſirous of promoting the good of ſouls, than acquiring all the wealth of the Indies; and ſuch, bleſſed be God, may be found. In the primitive times they abounded: At the beginning of the reformation from Popery, the Proteſtant intereſt was in ſo low a ſtate, that the ſtudents in Germany were obliged to ſing Pſalms at peoples doors, for the ſake of a bit of bread; to ſtudy by moonlight, becauſe they could not afford candle; and to ſuffer all the extremities of cold and hunger in fitting themſelves for a profeſſion, in which they had no proſpect of any thing in this life to recompenſe their toil. What names are there amongſt the clergy of the eſtabliſhment, who ſhine brighter as defenders of Chriſtianity againſt all its oppoſers, than numbers of the Diſſenters? Watts, Doddridge, Grove, Foſter, Leland, Abernethy, Benſon, Duchal, Chandler, Lardner, and many others of diſtinguiſhed merit (not to mention the venerable names of the fathers of non-conformity who reſolutely perſiſted in doing their duty as miniſters, notwithſtanding all oppoſition) had no expectations of profit or honour, ſeveral of them refuſed conſiderable offers, not one of them got rich by his profeſſion, and ſome both lived and died in very ſtrait and narrow circumſtances. The proſpects of Diſſenting miniſters are now very diſcouraging; yet many chearfully devote themſelves to the office, and are living proofs, that religion itſelf has charms enow, to al-

lure many into its ſervice without the aid of thoſe temporal emoluments, which great numbers indeed ſeek after as the principal things. But whatever titles ſuch may claim to themſelves or beſtow upon each other in the reſpective churches of the chriſtian world as eſtabliſhed by *law*, they are not worthy of a place or a name in the church of Chriſt as eſtabliſhed by *him*. The enemies of religion will regard all that they can ſay in its defence merely as things of courſe, and continue to doubt their ſincerity, whatever plauſible arguments they may make uſe of, whilſt their views appear to be ſo directly oppoſite to thoſe of the bleſſed Jeſus and his Apoſtles, whoſe examples they conſtantly recommend to the imitation of the laity. It would conduce much more to the honour, and to the intereſt of Chriſtianity, to be entirely without a regular miniſtry, than to be defended by thoſe who apply their parts and religion with equal zeal to defend thoſe doctrines and forms by which they get their wealth, as if built upon the ſame foundation. Nor can it be ſaid, that the beſt endowed churches are ſupplied with the moſt uſeful teachers. Witneſs the church of Rome. Learned thoſe may be, and often are, whom ſuch motives entice; but they muſt be very deficient in thoſe qualities, without which no one ever ought to undertake the charge of Chriſt's flock, or to enter as a labourer into his vineyard. If any think that by this reaſoning, I endeavour to repreſent a regular

regular miniſtry as entirely uſeleſs, and to perſuade the laity to withdraw themſelves from all ſuch, they are greatly miſtaken. From my early youth it was my deſire to be wholly devoted to the work of a goſpel-miniſter. I have gone through the courſe of ſtudies preparatory to it, and am now entirely unfit for any other employment or profeſſion. I derive my whole ſubſiſtence from the diſcharge of my duty, as the paſtor of a Chriſtian congregation, having no dependance or expectations but upon the generoſity of my people, and what was left by their pious anceſtors to ſupport religion amongſt them; together with a ſmall exhibition, which, through the generoſity of the worthy and liberal, is annually paid to a conſiderable number of thoſe who ſerve congregations utterly unable of themſelves to ſupport their ſpiritual guides.

It is a duty incumbent upon all the miniſters of Chriſt to oppoſe every ſuperſtition, every wrong notion, and to endeavour as much as poſſible to reſtore religion to it's primitive purity, not in the leaſt terrified by the mean apprehenſion of leſſening the dignity of their order, or the profits of their profeſſion. To ſuch unworthy motives there are numbers greatly ſuperior. Every faithful miniſter will carefully inſtruct his people in the mind and will of God; but no one ought to confine his regards entirely to his own flock, but, as a member of the church at large, to promote the common ſalvation, and to cheriſh juſt, worthy,

and rational ſentiments of religion in all. Men of this character are worthy of eſteem and reſpect; and it will conduce much to the benefit of ſociety if ſuch are ſo ſupported, as to be able to purſue theſe valuable deſigns with that chearfulneſs and alacrity which eaſineſs of circumſtances is well calculated to inſpire. According to the preſent ſtate of human affairs, the generality muſt neceſſarily be taken up with the buſineſs and concerns of life; they muſt attend to their trades, that ſome proviſion may be made for their families. Men of independent fortunes are too gay and diſſipated, to apply themſelves cloſely and ſeriouſly to the buſineſs of religion. Thoſe who have leiſure, and whoſe characters are worthy, may not be qualified for public inſtructions; and as to the poor, they might be ſlighted, and, if naturally modeſt and humble, would with difficulty be perſuaded to take that office upon them, when their ſuperiors, and perhaps their maſters, might be hearers. The enemies of Chriſtianity are many, their arguments are both acute and plauſible; that they want both ſolidity and truth has been often proved,—I was going to add, to their confuſion: but this would have been too haſtily ſaid; for they have the confidence to be continually offering thoſe objections as new, which have been ſo repeatedly anſwered, or ſometimes to throw them into another form, that they may have the appearance of novelty. The young and ſuperficial are too often deluded by them, and drawn into the ſnares of vice: The force of religious principles is greatly weakened in many, who are

thus deprived of thoſe conſolations which alone can ſupport a man in great difficulties and trials, and thus are they led to drown their ſorrows in the intoxicating cup, or meanly ſneak out of life by an act of cowardly ſuicide. Such are too often the pernicious conſequences of infidelity; for though it's advocates will often make fine harangues on the excellency and beauty of moral virtue, yet it is a certain fact, that vices, the moſt injurious to ſociety, have not only been called by ſoft names, but directly vindicated by writers of the firſt rank amongſt them. Some watchful guardians, whoſe learning and courſe of ſtudy may enable them to expoſe the futility of their arguments, to ſhew their miſchievous tendency, and to detect their miſrepreſentations, are capable of rendering ſervices to mankind, which juſtly deſerve to be rewarded by a comfortable ſupport. The emiſſaries of the church of Rome, and many enthuſiaſtical field-preachers, cannot be better oppoſed than by ſuch as inſtruct men in the true nature of the rational and manly religion taught in the ſcriptures, and ſet an example of it in their own practice. The public teachings of a perſon of education, though a youth, eſpecially when he is known to apply his time wholly to ſtudy and mental improvement, are more attentively liſtened to than thoſe of one more advanced in years, whoſe abilities are known to be pretty much upon a level with thoſe of his audience; and, beſides the common misfortunes of life, ſuch as engage in trade are often perplexed with croſſes and difficulties which

ruffle the ſpirits, and might unfit a good man for engaging publickly in religious duties. A regular miniſtry may, in theſe reſpects, be very uſeful; thoſe who thus labour in word and doctrine are worthy of honour, and all true Chriſtians *will eſteem them very highly in love for their works ſake*. But let it be on this account only; let not the reſpect due to their actions be transferred to any ſuppoſed ſanctity of character, different from what belongs to all good men alike. The Apoſtles are properly entitled Ambaſſadors of Chriſt, having derived their commiſſion immediately from him: the church, the people collectively, are his proper repreſentatives now, and to them it appertains to make choice of miniſters, who may declare and enforce the meſſage which is equally ſent to them all. If miniſters will call themſelves ambaſſadors, they are only the ambaſſadors of the church, from whom they derive their commiſſion, to propoſe thoſe terms of reconciliation to the unlearned and ignorant amongſt them, the knowledge of which it is the duty of all the diſciples of Jeſus to publiſh to every man.

If it be proved to ſatisfaction that ſome ought to devote themſelves entirely to the work of the miniſtry, many will think that there is a great propriety in their being ſolemnly ſet apart to it. There is generally ſome form obſerved when a man is made a member of any civil community; he is expected to enter into ſome engagements, and it is uſual to inſtruct him in, or remind him of, the duties he is to perform.

This appears to be very reaſonable. But the manner in which ordinations are generally conducted amongſt proteſtant diſſenters (ſetting aſide the doctrine of the church on this head) implies ſomething more. A young man, after having ſpent five years in one of our Academies, prayed in the family with the tutor or tutors and the ſtudents, and ſeveral times preached before them with approbation, thus giving ſufficient proofs of his ability to undertake the work of the miniſtry, and being recommended by others who are acquainted with his character and his proficiency, is ſent abroad into the world.

For ſome time he is perhaps an occaſional preacher, or, which is frequently the caſe, choſen immediately to the care of a congregation. He leads their devotions, he inſtructs them in the duties of religion, he explains the ſcripture, and is expected to be ready on all occaſions to adminiſter the word of conſolation to the afflicted. But though he be thought ſufficiently qualified for thoſe purpoſes, if a child is to be baptized, or the ordinance of the Lord's Supper adminiſtered, the paſtor of ſome other congregation muſt be called in. Does not this lead men to imagine, that ordination conveys ſome extraordinary powers? After two or three years, or often more, the miniſter may poſſibly think it fit to be fully qualified himſelf. The ſervice is generally conducted amongſt all our denominations in the following manner, except that

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ſome miniſters are ordained, and the exhortation given before the dilivery of the ſermon: And a few have been ordained without either a confeſſion of faith or laying on of hands, concerning which ceremony, when uſed, care is always taken to inform the people that it is retained merely as an apoſtolical cuſtom, and that they do not make the leaſt pretence to any extraordinary powers reſiding in them which can be conveyed to another perſon. The ſervice begins ſometimes with an introductory diſcourſe, explaining the nature and uſe of what they are about to perform; but more generally with a ſhort prayer, and reading the ſcriptures. Another miniſter is engaged in the long prayer, in which ſupplications are offered up for the world in general, the increaſe of the Redeemer's intereſt, for our own nation and its concerns, for the King, the Queen, and the royal family, for the great officers of ſtate, the parliament, magiſtrates, miniſters of the Goſpel, the ſick and afflicted, for friends and enemies, or any other particulars concerning the nation at large, particular ſocieties, or any individuals who deſire the prayers of the congregation aſſembled. A ſermon is then delivered, in which ſome ſuitable topic is choſen, ſuch as the deſign and uſe of the goſpel-miniſtry, and the reciprocal duties between them and their people; and for the uſe of the latter this part of the ſervice is particularly deſigned. The miniſter to be ordained is then called upon to

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give a confeſſion of his Faith, which he does entirely in his own words, and is either longer or ſhorter, more particular or more general, as he thinks fit. Being then aſked ſome queſtions with regard to his views, his reſolutions, his reaſons for chuſing rather to be ordained as a diſſenting miniſter than as a miniſter of the eſtabliſhment, his opinion of the reformation from Popery, and ſome other particulars of the like kind; to which having anſwered, he kneels down, and ſome venerable paſtor, ſtanding by him, prays to God for a bleſſing on his labours, that he may remember the ſolemn engagements into which he hath entered, and have grace to fulfil them; and in ſome part of the prayer lays his hand on his head, thoſe preſent doing the ſame. This being finiſhed, the miniſters preſent give to him who is ordained *the right hand of fellowſhip, (Gal. ii. 9.)* and one of them delivers a charge or exhortation, putting him in remembrance of the importance of his work, the duties expected from him, and preſſing him to be faithful and diligent by ſuitable motives, eſpecially from the conſideration of the account he is to render to Chriſt Jeſus, the great Shepherd and Biſhop of Souls. The whole is concluded with a prayer: and as it is common for a different miniſter (though none but ſuch as have been ordained engage) to perform each part, ſome verſes of a Pſalm or Hymn are ſung, whilſt one comes down from the pulpit or deſk to make room for another.

another. In this manner I myſelf was ordained, and have been with pleaſure a ſpectator of the ſolemnity when others have been thus ſet apart. There is ſomething very affecting and ſerious in it, and both miniſters and people are in general pleaſed and edified.

The great objection to be made to this cuſtom is, the people are led to ſuppoſe, that a man is qualified by means of it to perform duties he was not fit for before. Would it not then be more eligible, if every perſon permitted to preach was alſo allowed to baptize or adminiſter the ordinance of the Lord's Supper to any vacant congregation? When called to the care of a church, and having declared his acceptance of it, as the duty of prayer upon particular occaſions is often recommended by the example of the firſt preachers of chriſtianity, and to exhort one another of allowed importance, if a day was ſet apart by the congregation for this purpoſe, and the ſervice conducted in a manner ſomewhat different from what is uſual, would not every valuable end be anſwered?

Some neighbouring miniſter may begin with prayer and reading the ſcriptures, and then ſome other addreſs himſelf to him whom the congregation have choſen, and without aſking for a confeſſion of Faith,* only deſire him pub-

* This cuſtom may lead to a ſuppoſition, that miniſters have a right to demand it; to which as they do not pretend, the thing is uſeleſs in every view. The people are to judge of a man's

publickly to declare the views with which he engages in the miniſtry, and his reſolution of performing the duties of it, and when this is done, recommend him by prayer to the bleſſing of God, without any impoſition of hands; which, as it is a ceremony that really means nothing, had beſt be omitted. A ſermon explaining the duties incumbent on miniſters and their people, would be very ſeaſonable, and the whole ought to be concluded with a prayer, which the miniſter of the congregation may very properly offer up. Singing makes a part of every act of public worſhip. There would be no appearance of ſuperſtition in this, the length would not tire; for though the variety of ſervices in the uſual method, helps to keep up the attention, yet too much is crouded upon the memory of the hearers. In propoſing that miniſters ſhould be engaged on ſuch occaſions, I would by no means be underſtood as if I thought the members of the congregation unqualified. Every part of the ſervice may very properly be performed by ſome worthy laymen, their prayers would be to the full as acceptable, and their concurrence with thoſe of the miniſters as neceſſary. But there is reaſon to apprehend that few of our brethren of the laity would chuſe publickly to engage in ſuch exerciſes; nor can they in general be ſuppoſed

a man's ſentiments by his preaching; and if he con eals them in his ſermons, he may be only general in a confeſſion, and thus leave them as much in the dark as before.

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to be ſo well qualified, as thoſe whoſe daily courſe of ſtudies tends to fit them for it. If any members of the congregation are able and willing, let the whole be done amongſt themſelves, and the miniſters of other ſocieties who ſhall attend be merely ſpectators. If the method here propoſed ſhould at any time be adopted, there can be no doubt of the impropriety of its being performed any where but amongſt the people by whom the miniſter is choſen. It is now very common for two or three, and ſometimes more to be ordained together, and perhaps neither of them in the place where he is ſettled, whereas the congregation ſhould be always preſent, join in the prayers, and hear the advice, as the perſons moſt nearly concerned. If a meeting-houſe be ſmall and inconvenient, it will not even in that caſe be right to fix on any other place, unleſs it be ſo near that all may attend; for without that, the whole may as well be omitted.

If a miniſter removes from one place to another, his relation to the firſt as a paſtor entirely ceaſes, a new connection is formed, and the ſame reaſons which rendered the ſolemnity of recommending him to the divine bleſſing, upon his firſt ſettlement, uſeful and proper, argue as ſtrongly for the repetition of it. Of this many congregations are ſenſible, and have always a day of prayer on ſuch occaſions. It may not perhaps be neceſſary for the miniſter again to repeat what his intentions

tions were in taking the office upon him; though there can be nothing amiſs in his being deſired to declare to thoſe aſſembled on the occaſion, that he will continue to be diligent and faithful. If any one ſhould be inclined occaſionally to miniſter to the neceſſities of a church, when deſtitute of a ſettled paſtor, but not to devote himſelf entirely to the work, there needs not any thing more than the approbation of the people who need his aſſiſtance. It is only on the ſettlement of one who gives himſelf wholly to the care of a church that the ſervice here recommended ſhould be performed. It is conſidered in this light only, and to prevent circumlocutions, that I have retained the diſtinct names of miniſters and the laity, and not from the ſuppoſition of any ſuperiority in the former to the latter; for they are indeed nothing more than their ſervants in the Goſpel.

The candid reader will forgive many defects in this little piece; to write plainly and intelligibly is my aim, to elegance of ſtile I make no pretenſions, but if I am miſtaken in any of my arguments ſhall be very glad to be ſet right. If what is here advanced ſhall be found, upon a careful examination, to be agreeable to reaſon and ſcripture, let the reader practiſe what is recommended.

If any member of the eſtabliſhment is convinced, that the doctrine of an uninterrupted ſucceſſion from the Apoſtles is groundleſs and abſurd, that miniſters derive their power from the

the people, and the ſacraments their efficacy, not from being adminiſtered by one on whom the Biſhop has laid his hands, but from the pious intention of the receiver and the bleſſing of God, he will think himſelf bound in duty, as a faithful ſervant of Chriſt, to oppoſe ſuch ſuperſtitions, and no longer attend upon the vicar or curate of the place where he reſides, unleſs he be a man who adorns his Chriſtian profeſſion by an innocent and exemplary life, *and is an example to the flock in word, in converſation, in charity, in ſpirit, in faith, in purity.* Proteſtant diſſenters will not be too raſh and haſty in the choice of a miniſter, (of which ſome have had great reaſon to repent) when they conſider that the perſon whom they thus chuſe, is, in conſequence of that choice, fully authorized to perform every religious office amongſt them. They ſhould be thoroughly acquainted with a miniſter's character, and have a greater knowledge of his abilities than can be attained by hearing three or four ſermons, before an invitation is given. The Laity in general, when they conſider the truſt which is repoſed in them by Chriſt Jeſus, and the ſervices required of them as his ſubjects, ſhould endeavour to adorn the Goſpel by the purity and holineſs of their lives; and thus be always fit, as thoſe who are made prieſts unto God, to approach the throne of grace, and find acceptance. They ſhould ſtudy to improve the gift of prayer by cultivating a devotional temper,

ſo

ſo as to be ready when the church requires their help, and they ought thoroughly to acquaint themſelves, with the principles and the nature of true religion, that they may be able to defend the Goſpel againſt ſuch as oppoſe it, and to inſtruct thoſe who are Chriſtians in name only.

Then ſhall we ſee religion revive and flouriſh, the knowledge of Jeſus will ſpread, and his name be more and more honoured. Whether we aſſiſt in the great deſign or not, yea though we ſhould all join to oppoſe it, yet the decree long ſince went out, that all idolatry, ſuperſtition and groſs corruptions of true Chriſtianity ſhall at length come to an end, and pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father every where prevail. Happy will it be for thoſe who uſe their utmoſt endeavours to promote the glorious deſigns of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs! and the ſooner Chriſtians are prevailed upon to unite in this great work, the ſooner will it be accompliſhed. The laity muſt be hearty in the cauſe; it is by them the grand oppoſition muſt be made to thoſe Prieſtly Claims, which are both the foundation and the ſupport of the many impieties and abſurdities, which have diſgraced Chriſtianity, prevented its becoming the religion of mankind, and greatly leſſened the influence of its pure and holy doctrines on profeſſors themſelves, by teaching them to lay the great ſtreſs upon matters not only foreign to its nature, but

ſubverſive of its deſign. The pure goſpel of Jeſus has a direct tendency to unite all mankind in love, and by making them zealous only for good works, cauſe all bitterneſs, and wrath, and malice, and deceit, every thing contrary to juſtice and equity, to benevolence and compaſſion, to our internal peace and comfort to be deteſted and abhorred, that ſo we may be fitted, by a ſhort abode on earth, for an eternal heaven of perfect bleſſedneſs and glory, where we ſhall enjoy every thing without interruption which can adminiſter joy and delight to our purified and immortal ſouls.

If this publication excites the leaſt degree of attention to principles which may be followed by ſuch happy effects, my end will be anſwered, and my intention, which I hope is good, nobly rewarded.

POST-

POSTSCRIPT.

SOME perhaps may be inclined to think this pamphlet rather an attack upon the church of England in particular, than upon the practice of Chriſtian churches in general. I did not intend it as ſuch; and if I do not expreſs myſelf with that warmth on the ſubject of ordination as it is now conſidered and practiſed amongſt the diſſenters, it is becauſe there are not thoſe glaring abſurdities in it which ſhock the underſtanding whenever the eſtabliſhed doctrines and their conſequences are reviewed. There are certainly more attacks upon the church of England than her members ſeem to be aware of. Every harangue againſt enthuſiaſm and ſuperſtition, is an attack upon ſome of her moſt ſolemn forms, and thoſe trifling ceremonies (i. e. in themſelves; for as impoſed as terms of communion they are very ſerious matters,) of which ſhe is ſo tenacious. Every piece of ridicule on the religious farces exhibited amongſt the Papiſts, may be turned upon our own biſhops, who, when that which they have eagerly ſought after is obtained and they are ſolemnly to be

conſecrated to it, ſay, "*Nolo epiſcopari*,"* "I "am unwilling to be a biſhop:" It is alſo appointed that two biſhops ſhall preſent the biſhop elect to the archbiſhop, in this form: "Moſt Reverend Father in God, we preſent "unto you this *godly* and *well learned* man to "be ordained and conſecrated Biſhop." Many, very many, pious and excellent men are thus preſented, yet ſometimes it muſt be allowed, that uſing the epithet *godly* is ſad trifling in a ſerious matter: That biſhops in general are *well learned* may not be diſputed; but certainly thoſe Engliſh divines, who are conſecrated to Welch biſhoprics, (and when do we find a divine of that country ſo happy?) are quite deficient in a part of knowledge eſſential to a goſpel biſhop, that of the Language of thoſe committed to his care. Can we help ſmiling to hear the holy man promiſe to teach and exhort thoſe who cannot underſtand a word he ſays? If they can impart ſuch gifts as the power of forgiving ſins, and conferring the Holy Ghoſt, ſtrange that they cannot give men to ſpeak with other tongues! a talent very neceſſary in the caſe referred to, though really *mean* when

* It was once a cuſtom for the Speaker of the Houſe of Commons to pretend to take the chair with great reluctance, and, whilſt ſome of the members were forcing the perſon choſen, he would ſtruggle, and when brought to the chair make a vigorous effort, and ſay, "I am not yet ſeated in it, "gentlemen." When Sir Fletcher Norton, the preſent Speaker, was choſen, he expreſſed his diſapprobation of this foolery, and told the Houſe he would take the chair like a man. Why do not our biſhops act thus wiſely and rationally in the *moſt* ſerious, and ſolemn acts of religion?

compared

compared with what they profeſs to beſtow. The manner of electing a biſhop is not merely ridiculous, it is impious. " The King ſends " the Dean and Chapter a commiſſion to elect " a new biſhop, and a letter, recommending " (as it is called, for they dare not, at the peril " of loſing their preferments, chuſe any other) " ſome particular divine. On receiving this, " the Dean and Chapter meet, in a moſt ſo- " lemn manner to pray that God would direct " them in their choice, though they muſt and " always do fix on the perſon named to them; " who has, perhaps, been mentioned in the " public papers long before their commiſſion " arrives. Yet in another prayer they return " thanks to God for directing them to chooſe " ſo worthy a perſon, though they know that " they were wholly directed by the court, and " that, as it often happens, to a very un- " worthy man." Is there not ſomething very ridiculous in ſinging our prayers? but this is practiſed in the cathedrals. Or can they who conſecrate a piece of ground to bury the dead, with any tolerably grace call thoſe ſuperſtitious who ſprinkle with holy water the living? Every ſtroke of ſatire levelled at the fopperies of Popery, muſt certainly affect thoſe, who in ſome reſpects come not a jot behind them. " An attack on the pride and ambition of the " Pope, and the clergy his adherents, is at " leaſt a ſide-blow at our prelates, who not " only claim a ſeat in the houſe of Lords, " amongſt the peers of the realm, whilſt the

" Arch-

" Archbiſhop of Canterbury is exalted above " all the nobility and great officers of ſtate, " except the princes of the blood; and the " Archbiſhop of York, gives place to none but " the Lord-Chancellor; yet not content with " this, their houſes are called *Palaces*, and their " ſeats in the cathedrals *Thrones*. How into- " lerably vain would it be thought in the " greateſt nobleman in the land, to imitate " the *ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles*, in this particu- lar?" It is the duty of a Chriſtian miniſter to warn his people not to be too zealous for empty ſpeculations, and to live in charity with their brethren: This advice, however, is an attack upon the Athanaſian creed with a witneſs, and when followed muſt iſſue in it's utter rejection. Does any one ſay, *that in every nation*, and of every religion, *he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs ſhall be accepted of him?* This is a direct attack upon the 18th article, which declares thoſe to be *accurſed that preſume to ſay it*. If a clergyman, in his zeal againſt the Methodiſts, declares that good works, and not faith alone, contribute to our juſtification, he attacks and directly contradicts the 11th article of the church. It is a declaration often made from the pulpit, " *That the unrighteous ſhall not* " *inherit the kingdom of God.* This is an attack on the burial ſervice, which declares, concerning the worſt of wretches, an adulterer cut off in the very act, or a villain killed in an attempt to murder an innocent man, that they are committed to the duſt in ſure and certain hope

of a reſurrection to eternal life; God is thanked for taking them *unto himſelf* out of the miſeries of this ſinful world, and a prayer offered up for thoſe preſent, that they may reſt in him, as their hope is this their brother doth. In brief, the ſermons of almoſt every clergyman, are an attack upon the church, being contrary to its articles; and ſo is their practice in a multitude of inſtances, being as contrary to the canons. Yea, every improvement in any kind of ſcience, may be conſidered in the ſame light, as it tends to produce a diſlike to abſurdities of every kind impoſed upon us in the days of ignorance. It is therefore an excellent remark of one, known and honoured as a philoſopher by all the learned abroad, and not a little famous as a divine at home, That the biſhops and clergy have no more reaſon to fear a direct attack upon the Hierarchy, than an air-pump or an electrical machine. The latter will work as ſurely, and, perhaps, not more ſlowly. If this be not a ſufficient apology for any thing in my pamphlet, which may ſeem to be levelled at the church of England in particular, I can, however, ſay no more in my defence.

FINIS.

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The following Character is given of the latter Tract in the Monthly Review for July 1773.

" This little Tract is intended for the Information of thoſe Perſons " whoſe Time, or Circumſtances, will not permit them to gather " it from larger Performances. It is, indeed, *multum in parvo*, " and leaves no Room to ſuſpect the Writer of mercenary Mo- " tives. The Revival of ancient Diſputes or Animoſities is not, " in itſelf, pleaſing or deſirable; but to remind Men of the " Principles of Liberty, to warn them againſt Political or Eccle- " ſiaſtical Encroachments, and to ſhew them in what Religion " conſiſts, as diſtinguiſhed from it's mere Circumſtantials or " Formalities—theſe are, in Truth, important Ends; and in " theſe Views it is to be wiſhed that Publications of the kind " now before us might be eaſily attained and circulated. The " Author aims at Impartiality in his Relations, which is ſuperior " to any Elegance or Ornaments of Stile. He writes with Plain- " neſs becauſe he writes for general Inſtruction; but he writes " with good Senſe and Perſpicuity. He properly obſerves, that " every material Circumſtance could not be recorded in ſo ſmall " a Pamphlet, and it is probable he found ſome Difficulty in ſe- " lecting the moſt ſtriking Facts. Though we do not propoſe " any long Extracts from this Publication, we find ourſelves " much inclined to inſert Two ſhort Paſſages that follow, re- " lative to the Adminiſtration of Affairs in the Time of Archbi- " ſhop Laud." Theſe Paſſages are quoted.